

Editor's Introduction

Kathy Evans
Assistant Professor of Special Education
Department of Education
Eastern Mennonite University

At *Catalyst*, scholarly innovation is an ever-present goal. We acknowledge that the academic publication process has long been criticized for its inability to keep pace with the dynamic reality of social life. Whereas the peer-review process does take time and should not in our view be compromised, the established notion that research should be published exclusively in issues composed of multiple manuscripts is far less sacred. Whereas a well organized and artfully crafted issue can be greater than the sum of its parts, a great advantage to our online format is that we do not have to choose between taking the time to craft an entire issue or publishing an individual piece of immediately relevant research. Thus, in addition to our regular issues, *Catalyst* publishes individual articles or "Sparks." We hope that Lee E. Ross's "Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword," which follows this editorial introduction, will spark critical discussions about the role of authority, scriptural interpretation, patriarchy, and violence in our society.

Drone strikes. School shootings. Hate speech.

The problem of violence in Western society seems to be pervasive, characterized by sanctioned violence occurring at all levels of society and in almost every institution. In this article, we read about a particular type of violence between intimate partners (IPV) and the way in which the institution of religion functions to sanction such violence. Through an extensive review of the literature, the authors argue that in many religious communities, biblical passages have often been interpreted as supporting patriarchal violence against women, although they do acknowledge that not all IPV is directed at women or perpetuated by men. For example, in the section on historical context, the authors reference texts that suggest that physical discipline of the wife was historically regarded as "one of the religious duties of the husband" (p. 6). Further, by citing previous research on domestic violence, they conclude that religious institutions, particularly those with more conservative ideologies, often reinforce IPV by proof-texting certain passages of the Bible. For example, some researchers have found that biblical texts have been used to preach that women should submit to their husbands, that forgiveness should be granted to the abusers, or that abused women should view their situation as an opportunity to strengthen their faith.

Having grown up in a conservative Judeo-Christian culture and having left that culture for a religious community grounded on justice and peacebuilding, the ideas in the article prompted several questions for me. Did my own reli-

gious community foster violence in the home? Were there families where hidden violence laid lurking behind closed doors? Something in me rails against these thoughts and I want to adamantly deny that the faith of my childhood could have been complicit in promoting violence. And yet, women were explicitly positioned as subservient to men, unconditional forgiveness was certainly preached, and spiritual growth through suffering was applauded. Did these messages subtly enforce domestic violence?

The authors claim that the purpose of the article is to "promote a more constructive dialogue among religious leaders and parishioners to help stem the rising tide of IPV" (p. 2). Thus, in this Spark issue of *Catalyst*, I would like to invite religious leaders, parishioners, and others to join in a constructive dialogue about the role of religion in either perpetuating or dismantling violence between intimate partners. Using this article by Ross as a jumping off point, I propose some questions that might guide our discussion.

- As you read the article, what were your initial thoughts? Did you resonate with the authors' contention that religion seems to sanction IPV? Or are the authors projecting onto religious communities a reality that no longer holds? Do you personally have concerns that religious communities, specifically Judeo-Christian communities, continue to undermine efforts to quell IPV?
- In your own experiences with religion, what has been your understanding of the patriarchal nature of God? Is this an outdated caricature of God? What other ways of viewing God are available that might be more honoring of women?
- The authors only briefly allude to the separation of church and state. Should law enforcement be able to interfere with religious freedom in order to ensure the safety of women who are victims of IPV?

Correspondence regarding this editorial should be directed to: Kathy Evans (kathy.evans@emu.edu), Department of Education, Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Road, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22802.

- The authors provide several suggestions for addressing IPV within a religious context. What are your reflections on these suggestions? Are there other options to consider? Do you find any of their ideas problematic?